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The Golden Rule Among Nations

By ANDREW C. McLAUGHLIN

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The Golden Rule Among Nations. *Andrew C. McLaughlin,* The University of Chicago.

The author of this pamphlet, Professor Andrew C. McLaughlin, is one of the leading historians of the present day, the head of the Department of History in the University of Chicago since 1908, *formerly Director of Historical Research in the Carnegie Institute of Washington, D. C., and the author of many works in American History, and especially upon the Constitution.*

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The Golden Rule Among Nations

By

ANDREW C. McLAUGHLIN

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Nearly everyone, I suppose, accepts in a general and theoretical way the principle of the golden rule. It is, however, very often put to one side with the remark that it will not "work." The answer to this remark is that it has never been given a proper opportunity to work, and indeed, on the other hand, to the extent that it is embodied in ordinary personal ethics and in international affairs, to that extent are personal ethics and international affairs sane and wholesome. One reason, as it seems to a layman, for the non-acceptance of certain fundamental religious principles, one reason why they are not more widely lived up to, is that they are looked upon as something extraneous, superimposed, handed down from above, and that they therefore lack a certain degree of reality and of actuality. As a matter of fact, the apprehension of fundamental religious principles is the story of the development of civilization. A principle develops and takes its hold

upon the thoughts and acts of men because of its essential validity.

This assertion does not mean that the precepts of moral conduct were not begotten before men existed at all; it does mean that in the course of time those precepts have gained actual working force and reality, as the product of human experience. Every one of the principles of morality has for its support the long history of mankind in the conscious and unconscious endeavor to learn the art of living. Codes of morality, it is true, do vary from age to age; but the fundamentals have behind them centuries of human trial and effort. The essentials of morality have been woven into the fabric of human thought and conscience by the struggle of men upward from primitive life. Vary these assertions or modify them as you will, if you accept them even in part they will invalidate a notion that morality and religion are distinct from ordinary living, and that precepts of morality may be sound in theory but quite inappropriate for the common tasks of the every day world. They can not be both theoretically or abstractly defensible, and practically unworkable. They have been worked out; the very recognition of their abstract validity is a product of life's his-

tory. That is just as true as to say that the laws of physics or chemistry were not created by man, but he has by experiment discovered them and he knows they are real because they work, and because disregard of them may bring disaster. *The recognition and application of moral principles form the basis of civilization*, much more truly of course than the apprehension of the laws of the physical universe.

In dealing with the golden rule, therefore, we are not dealing with some duty superimposed on men, tending to interfere with ordinary wholesome processes of life, *but with part of the system of civilization, which has been begotten by centuries of actual living*. Science, it is sometimes said and justly said, is in danger of out-growing morality, putting in the hands of man tremendous physical powers while he has not the moral vigor to manage them rightly. The past generations have given attention to the nature of the physical universe and have discovered its laws; within the last hundred years greater changes have taken place, because of the application of science to industry, than had occurred in the course of many previous centuries. Under these conditions there has come a new and pressing need for the study of man and of

human relationships; and first of all a need of sweeping aside the kind of thinking which would make a moral principle nothing but an abstraction, a denatured precept, true but unworkable—as if one should say that a law in electrical science is true, though in practice nature does not work that way. *If men are now thinking scientifically, they must learn to think also morally and historically.* They must realize that mankind has lived on this planet some thousands upon thousands of years, and that in the course of aeons he has wrought out processes of spiritual living, and has come to know something of his own place in nature and to embody if only imperfectly, in his daily life and social intercourse some of the principles we call moral.

We talk blithely, almost flippantly, in these days about civilization; and though the word is flung about with unseemly ease, it is well we should know that there is such a thing, and should know that it is beset with special dangers and special responsibilities. When we contemplate the wonders of science or stand perplexed before the stupendous problems of modern life, many of which have been begotten by science, it is well to remember that civilization is not a synonym

for bodily ease or speedy transportation. Civilization will thrive, under these new helpful or perhaps burdening conditions, to the extent that it succeeds *in living up to the precepts of morality and in begetting new and wider application of age old principles*. Morality is integrating, up-building; immorality is disintegrating, destructive. The question is therefore how far shall we be successful in applying to the new world, to life and opportunities for life created by science, the fundamental principles of integrating and up-building morality.

We commonly find at least the outward acknowledgment of certain elementary moral principles and of the need of them in everyday life. But that these moral principles should openly and actively govern the relations of nations, is not so often said; probably it is not very widely accepted as a principle. The difficulty seems to be this: There is not as yet full appreciation of the extent to which nations have been brought into contact by modern communication and transportation; that these contacts make possible all kinds of misunderstandings; that the world is near constituting an industrial or economic unit, or, to put it the other way, that the industrial

and economic system is of world-wide dimensions; that no nation any more than an individual man can live the modern life in isolation. By this is meant not only that it may be unwise to try but also that it is a practical impossibility to live the lives of a century or so ago; that in many respects, the nations, though still possessed of political independence and separateness, are really intermingled with others; in short, that not only are there ways in which one nation comes into relationship or communication with others, but in many particulars there is an actual interlacing and a community of thought and interest and activity. Such a system, with all its terrifying perplexity and all its possible catastrophies, must have—is it necessary to say?—*simply must have a body of international morality* to sustain it, a code of general political or state morality as the hand-maiden of a developed and developing commercial morality. Without it there must be chaos.

These rapid developments forcing upon our attention, the fact that the world is in some respects a unit, are similar to those that came rather suddenly upon us in America only a few decades ago when we discovered the integrity or wholeness of

our national economic life and found we were all members of an actual community, each dependent on his fellow for some of the necessities of life. We demanded then, and we succeeded in getting in considerable degree, a fuller recognition of public duty and responsibility in the conduct of industry. A well-known publicist in those days published an able article called "New Varieties of Sin"; but in fact the sin was of the old variety, although the expansion of modern living made some varieties a thousand times more dangerous. The need was for wider application of the old morality.

Among the principles entering into the very heart of civilization is the principle, or the fact, that *physical force is not the only force*, and that the strong are under obligations to care for and protect the weak; there is a recognition of duty to others. All of us at least dimly recognize that a world of pure personal selfishness would be a world of savagery, an impossible place to live in. But, accepting this truth in ordinary daily intercourse between man and man, we have as yet not seen fit to adopt it frankly in international affairs. And yet it seems to be perfectly plain that the same moral principles must govern in national and interna-

tional life, the same principles that we realize in personal relationships. They lie, as we have said, at the very heart of civilization. In a large degree, though not universally, international affairs have been based on unalloyed selfishness, backed by force; or, if there was any deviation from the plain and narrow rule of self-protection and self-aggrandizament, such deviation has been looked upon askance, as evidence of an unsound mind. Strangely, in as much as nations are men, duty rather than right has entered slightly or ineffectively the realm of international laws and codes of diplomatic conduct. If this be exaggeration, let it go as that. No wonder then that some persons not intending to pose as moralists, now declare that international *law must be remade on the basis of duty*, the duty of our nation to another. It is necessary, they say to start with duty, not with rights.

If we saw some of these things amid the clash and clamor of the world war, we seem to have forgotten them. We need to recall to our minds the essence of German political philosophy and its bearings on international affairs. For that philosophy taught the majesty of force and calmly proclaimed that principles of unselfish morality had no

bearings on the State. The State was the embodiment of force. The peril of the late war lay in this doctrine of Machtpolitik; in the possibility of victory for the philosophy of force. The little state, in this code of international morality, had scarcely a right to be at all; for being weak it denied by its very existence the first postulate of politics that the State is strength. We made war against that principle; and unless the war and victory result in embodying the opposite principle in the political philosophy and political practice of the civilized world, the war was largely a failure, because it did not register a step forward in civilization; that step forward, we had reason to hope, would be to adopt in international affairs the code of honor and morality, which every decent citizen recognizes and which lies at the basis of such civilized and peaceful life as we have in our own communities.

Until the principles of international relationship are changed, until the point of view is, at least in theory, that of duty and obligation, not privilege based on mere power, wars are likely to come, and when they do come we must of course do our part in defending our homes and our firesides; for I am not attempting to inculcate the doctrine of

extreme paificism or of non-resistance. Neither do I maintain that the announcement of fine phrases about peace and duty will be perennially effective. I only maintain, what would not seem to need defense: that the world of the present has moved on to such a stage that it is imperatively necessary to have a law and philosophy of civilization, and not try to get on with the law and philosophy of the jungle; that the *next step forward in civilization is the open and frank acknowledgment of duty in the affairs of the world at large.*

In some respects America is at a disadvantage in any attempt to understand the world. Possibly we are peculiarly provincial; whether that be true or not, we are or have been economically nearly independent. At least, with abundant resources, we have approached that state of blessedness known to the old fashioned economist as the self-sufficing nation. We could live if all the doors were closed. But what nation wishes to have its doors closed? Furthermore there is what I may call the golden rule of economics; trade is beneficial to purchaser and seller; trade between nations is of mutual advantage, the laws of economics and the practice of the modern world cry out against seclusion; and this only

means that the economic life, based on physical resources, has grown away from the old notion that a nation can live for itself alone. If war taught nothing else than the golden rule of economics that the prosperity of a nation is beneficial to its neighbor, and the poverty of one nation is a misfortune to the world— if the war taught only the interdependence or unmistakable community of interest among nations, it taught a valuable lesson, The question that faces us is, will the lesson be properly learned? Respect for the prosperity of a neighbor is not vitiating and impoverishing sentimentality, but stimulating and upbuilding; it is based on fact. *The Golden Rule*, call it a selfish golden rule if you like, *will "work"*.

In the development of human ideas and principles there comes a time when it is necessary to give them institutional expression; to give them objective form. That is why the church came into existence, I imagine. So, if we are at all prepared to admit the fact of international interdependence and the parallel fact that in this very intimate relationship there must be moral principles to safeguard civilization,— then, I think, we may also see that *the time has come to give some kind of insti-*

tutional expression to this fact and this belief.

Such words as these sound rather foolishly abstract; but I shall be more concrete in a moment. Just now I wish to emphasize the thought that ideas making for human good or ill in the course of time, seek formulation and find a certain permanent efficacy in institutions; in this respect peace and fellowship, although they are of the spirit, need method of mechanical expression. A hundred and forty years ago our forefathers believed that men could establish a government, and they found means for doing so; they saw the interdependence of the American states, and they formed the American union; they had faith in men's ability for self-government and they built constitutions in accord with this faith. The time comes when faith must be institutionalized.

I shall not delve into the deep and muddy waters of legal or historical controversy or discuss that much used and much abused word "sovereignty" about which we hear so much. But as I read American history, the notion that men can stand aloof and withstand the currents of time appears peculiarly fallacious. And sometimes it seems as if that aloofness and sense of

irresponsibility is what sovereignty means, as the word is used today. But this discussion leads too far afield, and I will not pursue it. In the present emergency there is no danger to the sovereignty and independence of the American nation.

No one can discuss the obligations of accepting international duty without being accused of the heinous offense of internationalism. If he pleads for the recognition of moral principles and for institutionalizing them in international law he is said to be guilty of this worst of heresies. Now internationalism in the fullest sense of the word may come; it may come in the centuries before us so fully that nationalism disappears, and the world becomes a single state; and, if that time does come, there will be no internationalism because there will be but one political structure. But of course what men fear, or say they fear, is a want of national patriotism. How anyone can have looked out on the war just passed, looked out through a glass however darkly, and seen a failure in national patriotism and devotion is beyond my comprehension. Never before in the world's history did boys and men fight more bravely, suffer more calmly, endure so patiently. The need of the day

is to know that national dignity is not dimmed by consideration for one's neighbor, and that righteousness and courtesy and helpfulness do not impugn sovereignty or bedraggle a nation's honor. On the whole, as I read history, nationalism, with all its sins,—I mean that new spirit of nationalism, which came in soon after the Reformation—has been a means of progress. In its wholesome forms it is not endangered today, unless it be by those who fear we shall in some manner lose our self-respect if we do our duty. An individual, a family, a church, does not lose individuality or strength by being neighborly. No man is less a man because he is a helpful thoughtful friend; no nation is hurt in its dignity as a nation by practicing neighborliness among the nations of the world. How unnecessary such statements as this appear to be! But the timid and the crafty and the bewildered throw dust in our eyes by brazenly confusing duty and ignominy, and speak as if international courtesy and active helpfulness detracted from the fullness of national existence.

In all such discussions as this, we are also met with the announcement of our obligation to "stand up for America". With that sentiment every reasonable

patriot is likely to agree. But what is America? Surely we have not come to the stage in our national life when America is only a geographical expression of a people whose chief pride is in automobiles, steel mills, sky-scrapers, and millions of bushels of corn. The founders of America, whatever use is made of their phrases by modern isolationists, never looked upon America as mere land and water. America was to them a bold experiment in idealism, a great adventure in a new social and political order. *America was an idea, a hope, a faith.* We can stand up for the real America only as we sustain and strengthen its principles of life. Those principles are essentially moral in their nature, for democracy is more than a form of government, more than machinery, more than putting ballots in boxes. It is a plan of human relationships, resting primarily on obligations; it connotes freedom, but freedom demands responsibility. *Democratic government without the spirit of democracy would be a sham and a failure,* and democracy does not mean the right of everyone to do as he chooses, but rather the duty of accommodating himself to the needs of others. We cannot remind ourselves of this too often; democracy is not individual willfulness or caprice,

but a relationship or a series of relationships, and its basis is essentially moral. Democracy is friendly companionship. *A man intellectually and spiritually isolated cannot be democratic-minded.* Can a nation, holding itself aloof from other nations, priding itself on its superiority, fearing the contamination of the vulgar world, be a democratic nation? In the democratic state, conclusions are reached by discussion; someone indeed has declared democracy to be "government by discussion", but of course its content is more than that. This discussion involves tolerance, respect for others, a recognition of community interests, that is to say a recognition of wholeness or intregity of the political and social body.

Standing up for America then, can only mean playing the role of the democrat in world affairs, strengthening those hopes and that faith which have meant America, and, by acting as a democratic nation, advocating the acceptance in the international relationships of those fundamental principles without which democracy can be nothing more than a complex, and perhaps painfully inefficient system of government. The call today is plain enough: *Democracy must be adopted in spirit and practice in international af-*

fairs; not that every man and woman should vote in diplomatic controversies, but that *nations in their relation one with another should adopt the moral code and moral spirit of democracy*, and this involves tolerance, friendliness, a recognition of common interests, open and frank discussion, the reaching of conclusions by conference. For, however much we have failed in America to live up to and actualize the morality of democracy, no one can question that democracy in its perfection involves moral qualities. To stand up for America means immediate participation in any and every movement which puts conference in the place of war and recognizes international duty above physical force. That America, a democratic nation by profession, should think it is democratic when it is not cooperating, is an amazing contradiction. How can it be otherwise than that this aloofness has damaged the cause of democracy the world over?

One of the early Americans, in defining what his country stood for, said it stood primarily for "liberty and law". Liberty and law are not mutually contradictory; for in civil society liberty can exist only where each person is under obligation to respect the rights of others; and *liberty would exist in com-*

pleteness, if each person should treat others as he would be treated himself. At all events, liberty is decidedly and emphatically a reciprocal affair. Law is an effort to adjust and determine obligations; those obligations are never really one-sided; they are reciprocating. Law says in plain words that in this or that respect you have no right to do to another what he has no right to do to you. Liberty and law are therefore not in conflict. Of course in practice law may by unwise and unjust, but in theory law seeks to give expression to social obligations without which there can be no liberty.

Now America is peculiarly the nation of law. It has its full share of lawbreakers; but its constitutional structure is legal. The United States of America, as a body politic, is founded on a written document; and that document is interpreted and enforced in courts as law. Individual states of the union, as large as Germany or England, come before the court at Washington for adjudication of their differences. We have covered an area as large as the whole continent of Europe by a system of law and set up courts for continent wide jurisdiction. Why is it that America can look askance at an attempt to bring courts into operation

for settlement of international controversies, as if a court of justice were some new and dangerous menace? Are we in this respect also to deny our own ideas in the face of a questioning world? When the Constitution of the United States was established, there were then at least six disputes between the American states similar to disputes in Europe that have ended in bloodshed; the Constitution provided for judicial determination of controversies between states.

The purpose of this paper is to make clear the conviction of the writer in the following particulars:

Moral principles are not something extraneous and purely artificial; civilization is based on them and its growth is marked by the increasing apprehension of their nature.

The modern world is made up of nations intimately associated, so intimately that their interests are often identical, for the world approaches economic integrity.

The well-worn principles of morality must be recognized in international relations, and the old notions and practices of suspicion and uncooperative selfishness must be abandoned. It will not do to say that the principles "won't work" when we admit

that social order in a civilized community is dependent on them.

America is under especial obligation to cooperate in any endeavor to conserve world peace and prosperity by conference and by application of principles of social morality, because democratic society rests upon those principles; real liberty and intelligent law are not in conflict, but mutually self-supporting; America has entered upon the great task of ruling an imperial domain by law, its whole political structure is peculiarly legal and it makes use of judicial tribunals for settling disputes which in Europe are subjects of political and diplomatic controversy or even war. From these things, it seems to follow that America is under obligation to act the part of a friendly and cooperating nation, eager to settle difficulties by discussion and by judicial decision. In such practical ways, consonant with self-respect, *American can help in the stabilization of civilization, which needs for its support the moral principle that one nation should treat another as it wishes to be treated itself.*

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